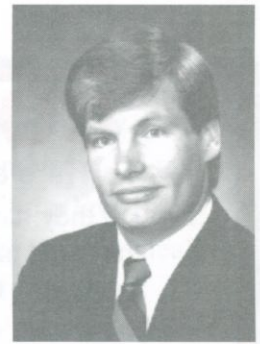




atlas air
Heating & Cooling

AN ENGINEER'S OPINION



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An Engineer's Opinion is published to assist homeowners in creating the healthiest, most comfortable environment in their homes at the most reasonable cost. If you have questions, criticism or input, we want to hear them. Please write or call me personally..... *Roger Grochmal, P.Eng., President*

EDITORIAL

CHOOSING A RESPONSIBLE CONTRACTOR

Over the last two issues of An Engineer's Opinion, I have talked about the importance of taking time to select a contractor. In fact, more time should be spent in contractor selection than in choosing the product you want. The best furnace or air conditioner installed incorrectly will provide 20 years of headaches, not the least of which are excess fuel consumption and shortened equipment life.

The contracting business today is more competitive than ever. There are no two contractors that are the same. They may deliver the same product to your home but the approach they take to the installation, the quality that they apply, and the after sales service they provide is vastly different. There are many opportunities to cut corners that can significantly affect the operation of the system, some intentionally and some through lack of knowledge. As a result, one of the most asked questions I get is, "How do I go about selecting a contractor?"

A neighbour of mine was planning to undertake a major home renovation a few years back and answered the question this way. She placed an ad in the local paper and asked people who had high quality work done to call her. She sifted through the calls, interviewed 3 or

4 contractors and selected one. The end result was a very good job. Most people do not want to go through this process for a \$3,000 to \$5,000 project. Yet they want the right contractor who will insure that they get the maximum comfort and enjoyment from their systems.



When I go on sales calls, I am astounded by how few questions I get asked about my company, the qualifications of our people and the value we add to the installation. I have finally come to the conclusion that most people just don't know the right questions to ask.

On the next page is a questionnaire that you can use to interview any contractor regardless of trade area. The answers you are looking for may be slightly different, but I guarantee you the results will be better.

Roger Grochmal, P. Eng
President

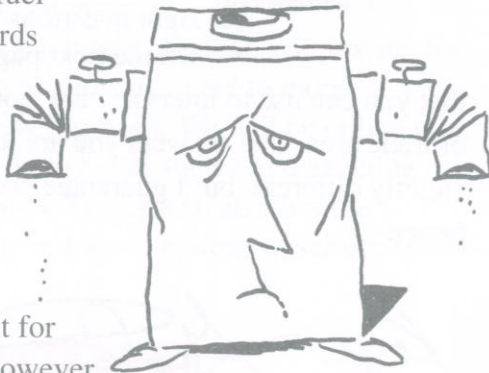
CONTRACTOR QUESTIONNAIRE

Here are 20 questions you need to have answered before you hire a contractor.

1. Do they have at least 5 years in business under the same name?
2. Were they truthful in all things that they told you?
3. Do they maintain a proper place of business including an office, shop and warehouse.
4. Have they supplied suitable references that checked out?
5. Do they operate a fully staffed service department?
6. Do they offer maintenance programs?
7. Are their workers directly employed by them or are they subcontractors?
8. Are their workers licensed to do the work you have contracted them to do?
9. Do they maintain a service history on your equipment?
10. Did they submit their price for the work on a formal proposal with the company properly identified on it?
11. Did they make oral promises that were not written on the contract?
12. Can they supply proof of insurance coverage and proof of Workers Compensation coverage?
13. Does a check with their bank indicate they are financially sound?
14. Did they offer you a written guarantee? Are warranty programs their own or do they buy them from a third party, putting you at risk?
15. Did they state in writing that all work would be done in accordance with all local building codes and that permits would be taken out where required?
16. Are they trained and equipped to comply with provincial ODP (Freon) regulations?
17. Are they able to offer financing?
18. Did they perform a heat gain/loss calculation to properly size the equipment?
19. Did they ask questions about your comfort in all areas of the house and consider the capacity of the duct system in matching it to the equipment quoted?
20. Do all the people in the company display a consistent regard for customer service?

A NEW FURNACE... When is it time?

Our recent understanding that the supply of fuel in the earth is not infinite has led to amazing advances in technology. Given fuel consumption standards today, any furnace over 10 years old is obsolete. If your furnace is in otherwise excellent condition, you may prefer to stick with it for a few more years. However, have it assessed by a reputable heating contractor. They should be able to give you an accurate estimate of the fuel savings available with various new furnace options - and also what expenses may be involved in keeping your present furnace operating safely for a few years. Look at that



against the cost of replacement and you can make a well informed decision.

Atlas competes vigorously for your business. We compete on the basis of our engineering skills and knowledge of products. And we compete on price to the extent it's safe to do so. But we know, as do the competitors we respect, that prices can be cut only so far before the interests of the purchaser are no longer served.



Unfortunately, these difficult economic times are causing some contractors to go beyond that point. As consumers we put a lot of pressure on retailers to

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give us more for our dollar. By and large that's a good thing. To keep themselves afloat, good businesses have found efficiencies that will serve them well long after the bad times are past. However some heating contractors have not responded to the challenge so wisely. These few try to create attractive pricing in a dangerous way - by cutting corners on installations. To get away with this they avoid permits, perhaps suggesting to you that the permit is "just more red tape" and they're trying to save you money.

Not true. In reality they duck the permit to duck the inspection that comes with it which would quickly reveal the deficiencies of the job. Codes and

standards are established to give you security. Atlas - and other reputable companies in our industry - would do what the code says even if it weren't the law. It's simply the right way to do business when you're dealing with something so important as a family's safety. ***Safety issues aside, it's wrong to make your furnace-buying decision on price alone.*** A furnace is extremely important to your well being. The one you buy today may be expected to last as long as you live in your home. Over time a few hundred dollars "saved" on a furnace may not look important against a history of high repair costs, excess fuel consumption, dissatisfaction with the performance and shorter equipment life.

It's Furnace Check-Up Time

In An Engineer's Opinion from the fall of 1992 we offered 6 essential rules for keeping the air in your home safe and healthy during the winter. We think this information is important enough to be presented again.



1. Do not start a season without having your furnace inspected and tuned by a professional. A furnace in poor condition may emit toxic gases. Most of these are odourless. The only warning may be nagging headaches, irritability, or susceptibility to lung infections.

2. If your chimney has not been inspected in the last three years, have it done immediately. A chimney deteriorated, or not well matched to your furnace, may prevent furnace contaminants from venting safely. It's not generally realized, but older, larger chimneys are not well suited to today's higher efficiency furnaces. The problem can normally be solved by the insertion of a metal liner.

3. Proper humidification is essential to health. In the cold of winter, centrally heated air without moisture can have lower relative humidity than that of the Sahara. It will dry furniture, hardwood floors, pictures, draperies, your house and you.

4. Ignore the advertised "cheap" duct cleaning. Duct cleaning firms have popped up recently, offering duct cleaning at low prices. When you have your furnace inspected, ask if the ducts need cleaning, but be skeptical. They don't need it often. When they do, the only effective method is vacuuming plus power scrubbing under at least 200 lbs. of air pressure. Anything less does more harm than good. Those advertised cheap duct jobs aren't worth bothering with.



5. Thorough air cleaning is vital to your health, and also to that of your furnace and air conditioner. It keeps dirt out of your furnace's heat exchanger and the air conditioner's coils, maintaining the equipment's design efficiency.

6. A furnace maintenance program is essential, but get one that works. The most important feature of any furnace maintenance program is prevention. Most service contracts offered, even that of a major utility, kick in only when you have a specific problem. Unfortunately, your first warning of a problem might be when your furnace goes off on a cold winter night or your family gets sick from escaping fumes.

What's Happening Around Atlas

ATLAS VIDEO

Atlas Air has just finished producing a short video to introduce our company and the CEO contractor network to people who have never had the opportunity to deal with Atlas. In general it describes the role that a professional contracting company has to play in delivering home comfort. Specifically it details the items that Atlas does to deliver the high level of service that our customers expect from us. To receive your free copy of the Atlas video, please call us at **905-279-3440**, fax to **905-279-4696**, write to us at the address below or order by e-mail from us at atlasair@istar.ca.

New Computer System

Atlas is making a major upgrade to its computer systems this fall. This is a complete upgrade of all hardware and software systems. Please excuse any glitches that you may experience as we go through the transition. Hopefully there will be none. The end result will be better customer service. We expect to be able to keep better records of the history of the work done in your home. This history will be quicker to access and will be available to everyone in the company. We will be using a computerized dispatch program that will provide for better scheduling to allow us to get to more customers on a timelier basis. We will be online with our major suppliers to better source and expedite equipment and parts. The system also has the capability to have remote computers in service trucks in the future.



ATLAS @ INTERNET

Atlas is now on the Internet. You can view our home page as part of an industry home comfort web site at www.comfortnet.com/on/atlas. We also have an e-mail address at atlasair@istar.ca for those of you who would like to communicate with us in that medium. We would like to hear from you.

NEW PRODUCT CORNER

FIREPLACE INSERTS

Atlas is pleased to announce a new line of gas fireplace inserts called Northern Flame, from CFM, the largest maker of gas fireplaces in Canada. If you would like to escape from the work and cost of real wood and enjoy the instant gratification that a gas fireplace insert from Atlas can give you, call today. No muss, no fuss, just heat when you want it. Prices starting at \$1,995.

CARBON MONOXIDE DETECTORS

Carbon monoxide detectors are now mandatory for new homes that have masonry fireplaces. This requirement has not been backdated for older homes but it makes good sense to insure peace of mind; it's an inexpensive safeguard that no home should be without. Ask your Atlas serviceman to tell you all about the different models available from the top names in the business: Nighthawk and American Home Sensor.

THE ATLAS AIR HUMIDIFIER

This has been one of the most successful products that Atlas has ever offered to their customers. This humidifier is high quality, reliable, with good capacity and has a very reasonable price. Standing water and the potential health problems that comes with it are gone. Maintenance is virtually eliminated. This is a best value item this winter. Order yours today for only \$321.



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Atlas Air Conditioning Company
1713 Mattawa Avenue
Mississauga, Ontario L4X 1K5
Phone: 905-279-3440